WILDSTORM UNIVERSE

#2
Sep

Suggested
For Mature
Readers

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SLEEPER

ED BRUBAKER
SEAN PHILLIPS

SEASON TWO

Sean
2004

--HAVE YOU ON **SAT-COM IMAGERY** MEETING WITH KNOWN CHINESE OPERATIVES, ASSHEAD.

IT'S NOT-- IT'S **NOT** WHAT YOU THINK! I'M NOT A **TRAITOR**, I WAS JUST--

LOOKS LIKE YOUR LITTLE SCHEME DIDN'T WORK OUT SO WELL, DID IT?

YOU'RE ***KIDDING***, RIGHT, SLAYTON?

I GOT RID OF ***TWO*** CORRUPT POST-HUMAN AGENTS AND THIS IDIOT IS ABOUT TO CONFESS TO LEAKING INFORMATION ABOUT OUR NEW ***ADMINISTRATION*** TO THE ENEMY.

WHICH IS ***EXACTLY*** THE KIND OF SCANDAL WE WERE HOPING TO AVOID.

WE'RE ON A TIGHTER LEASH THAN WE USED TO BE, LYNCH, ***REMEMBER*** THAT. I'M STILL AMAZED THE NEW ***POWERS THAT BE*** DIDN'T SHUT US DOWN FIRST THING.

IF YOU THINK I CAN'T SWEEP OUR LITTLE FRIEND HERE UNDER THE CARPET, THEN YOU HAVEN'T BEEN PAYING ATTENTION.

HE'S ABOUT TO GET A ***RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT*** TO ANTARCTICA, WHERE HE'LL BE KEPT UNDER HOUSE ARREST UNTIL HE'S GIVEN US EVERYTHING ON HIS CONTACTS.

THEN HE'LL BE ERASED.

SURE, THAT'S ***EASY***, BUT I THOUGHT ***CARVER*** WAS GOING TO TAKE CARE OF HIM?

WASN'T ***THAT*** THE PLAN?

SORT OF. BUT IT WAS ***ALSO*** A TEST.

STILL, HE KNOWS I'M ***LOOKING FOR HIM*** NOW. THE FIRST STEPS HAVE BEEN TAKEN.

AND I HAVE TO ADMIT, I'M IMPRESSED WITH HOLDEN'S RESTRAINT.

MAYBE THERE'S MORE OF ***MY*** OLD BOY LEFT INSIDE OF HIM THAN WE ***THOUGHT***, EH?

OR MAYBE HE'S JUST TIRED OF BEING MANIPULATED BY YOU?

WE'LL SEE.

MY BET IS THAT HE'LL BE TURNING UP IN EGYPT ANY DAY NOW, EITHER WAY.

THAT'S ***ENOUGH***, AGENT GOYER. YOU CAN TAKE THE PRISONER TO THE TRANSPORT NOW.

AND ***DON'T*** SIGN ANY PAPERWORK UNTIL YOU HEAR FROM ME.

YES SIR.

AGENT CARVER?

WE'LL BE TOUCHING DOWN IN ABOUT TEN MINUTES, SO I'LL NEED YOU AND YOUR MEN READY TO MOVE. WE'VE GOT TO GET BACK IN THE AIR ***ASAP.***

RIGHT.

It used to be so much easier for us to travel... Before Florida, before the embassy in Canada, before Tao became Public Enemy Number One.

Still, it hasn't really stopped the bastard from doing whatever he wants. It's just more complicated now.

OKAY, YOU TWO. TOUCH DOWN IN ***TEN.***

MODERN POST-HUMAN AMMO

From the outside, we're just a high-speed cargo plane.

Inside, though, we're flying FIRST CLASS in a secret compartment.

For all the talk of international security against terrorism, cargo planes are generally given a slight glance, at best.

While we touch down a few miles outside town, the plane transmits a signal that makes everyone think it's still in the air.

BEEP BEEP

And they're back in the sky before we've even left the airfield.

Tao's made billions using this system for smuggling drugs and weapons, now he uses it to smuggle his people to wherever they need to be.

And where do I need to be today? Cairo.

Where Tao wants me to accept Lynch's invitation for a meeting. Which is the last thing in the world I actually want to do... Yet here I am.

Funny how that always seems to happen.

Faith, Hope and Charity

Of course, there's the part I DIDN'T tell Tao.

The address Lynch's messenger gave me WASN'T where Lynch wanted to meet. It was where I'd find the woman who set us up last year.

Diamanda M'Batu, one-time queen of Egypt, before Tao tore apart her secret monarchy.

And the woman who caused the death of my best friend.

GENOCIDE! NO!!!

Why had I kept this information from Tao? I wasn't entirely sure myself.

But I suspected that Lynch knew I would. Just like he knew that I'd come after her, whether I wanted to meet with him or not.

I'd only known he was out of his coma for a week, and the old man was already fucking with my head again.

The question for me was whether his information on M'Batu was accurate.

It was possible this was just a lure to get me here, but if Lynch was trying to get me to trust him again, then lying wasn't the way to go.

So the ex-Queen was PROBABLY somewhere in that hotel...

...Waiting for me to get my hands around her throat.

84 NUBAR ST. CAIRO EGYPT

Now I just had to find the signals Lynch would use to get a message to me...

...And hope my Blackguard security detail would keep out of my way while I did what I came here for.

I figured I could ditch them when I needed to...

KRAK KRAK

...But apparently that wouldn't be necessary.

SHIT...

KRAK

<--SHOTS FIRED! ARMED AMERICAN DRESSED IN BLACK, FLEEING ON FOOT!>

KRAK

Shooting high impact bullets from almost two blocks away...

...Son of a bitch.

One of those HITS ME and even if I can't FEEL IT, it'll put me down for a while.

EEEOOOEEEOOOEEEOOOEE

SON OF A BITCH.

SKKSSSSHH

<HALT! POLICE!>

KA-CHOOM

AAAEEIIII!

PELECOT

Is my sniper still up there, watching all the fun they created?

<BASTARD PIG!>

Apparently so.

KRAK

So what the hell is going on?

Did Lynch really just lead me into a trap?

That doesn't make any sense.

But something else DOES...

Like the fact that even with the laser sight they didn't hit me once...just took out the Blackguards.

Then blew that hole in the wall right in front of the alley...

...And stopped that cop WITHOUT killing him.

The sniper wasn't trying to shoot me at all...

...They--SHE--was leading me here.

Veronica.

H--

Meet me outside the Cairo Tower in ~~30 minutes. I'll be~~ alone and now so will you.

--V

JESUS, LYNCH...REALLY PULLING OUT ALL THE STOPS, AREN'T YOU?

I should've known he wouldn't be fool enough to show up himself, but SMART ENOUGH to send the one person he knows I won't kill.

YOU'RE BLEEDING.

I *WAS*, YEAH... BULLETS'LL DO THAT TO YOU.

AND THAT DOESN'T HURT *AT ALL?*

YOU'RE KIDDING, RIGHT?

DIDN'T LYNCH TELL YOU *ANYTHING* ABOUT ME BEFORE HE SENT YOU ON THIS ERRAND?

YES, HE DID, HOLDEN, BUT IT'S JUST...IT'S KIND OF HARD TO BELIEVE. CAN I SEE THE WOUND? IS IT HEALED ALREADY?

DON'T-- DON'T TOUCH ME UNLESS YOU WANT TO SEE WHAT IT *FEELS LIKE* TO BE SHOT.

I CAN'T EVEN *REMEMBER* PAIN, BUT I'M PRETTY SURE BULLET WOUNDS HURT. A LOT.

CAN YOU FEEL ANYTHING?

IS THAT WHY YOU CAME HERE, VERONICA, TO ASK ME ABOUT MY *CONDITION?*

NO, I CAME TO TALK.

WHY?

BECAUSE YOU LEFT ME, AND EVERYONE ***LIED*** TO ME ABOUT WHY.

AND IT ***RUINED*** MY LIFE...I WAS ON THE TASK-FORCE TRYING TO ***CATCH YOU,*** FOR GOD'S SAKE...

AND YOU WERE WORKING FOR ***LYNCH*** ALL ALONG.

I ***HATED*** YOU, YOU KNOW? OR I THOUGHT I DID.

NOT AT FIRST. AT FIRST I WAS IN DENIAL, COULDN'T BELIEVE THE MAN I WAS GOING TO ***MARRY*** COULD TURN TRAITOR.

BUT YOU DID BELIEVE IT, EVENTUALLY.

YES...ALL THE ***EVIDENCE*** THEY HAD AGAINST YOU, AND...AND I DON'T KNOW...

WHAT?

SOMEWHERE INSIDE, IT MADE ***SENSE.*** I'D SEE YOU WHEN YOU GOT HOME FROM LYNCH'S MISSIONS.

YOU NEVER TALKED ABOUT THEM, BUT...I KNEW WHAT YOU WERE. I KNEW WHAT ***BLACK OPS*** MEANT.

VERONICA, I DIDN'T *VOLUNTEER* TO GO UNDERCOVER. LYNCH GAVE ME NO OTHER *CHOICE.*

I TELL MYSELF *THAT* SOMETIMES, TOO, BUT I HAVE A HARD TIME BELIEVING IT.

I WAS A SOLDIER. IT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU.

ANYWAY, IT'S A MOOT POINT AFTER ALL THESE YEARS.

I'M NOT A SOLDIER ANYMORE, I'M NOT UNDERCOVER...AND I'M *NOT* WORKING FOR LYNCH.

BUT YOU CAME HERE TO MEET WITH HIM ANYWAY?

I CAME FOR MY *OWN* REASONS, NOT HIS.

AND WHAT *ARE* THOSE, EXACTLY?

NONE OF YOUR CONCERN.

SO, THAT'S *IT?* THAT'S REALLY ALL YOU HAVE TO SAY TO ME?

WHAT DO YOU *WANT ME* TO SAY?

YOU COULD START BY EXPLAINING HOW YOU COULD WORK FOR TAO. REALLY WORK FOR HIM.

WHAT? HE'S NO DIFFERENT THAN LYNCH AND ALL THE REST OF THE BASTARDS AT I.O.

HE'S A *TERRORIST*, HOLDEN.

HE'S DESTABILIZED GOVERNMENTS ACROSS THE GLOBE, HE'S KILLED INNOCENT PEOPLE, AND GOD KNOWS WHAT HE'S DONE THAT WE *DON'T* KNOW ABOUT.

WHAT KIND OF BLACK OPS DO YOU THINK I *DID* FOR I.O.?

DESTABILIZING GOVERNMENTS, KILLING INNOCENT PEOPLE, AND LOTS OF STUFF YOU REALLY DON'T WANT TO KNOW ABOUT.

THAT'S *NOT* THE SAME. WITH I.O. THERE'S A GREATER *PURPOSE*...

IS THERE? OR IS IT JUST COVERT IMPERIALISM?

DEAD CHILDREN ARE STILL DEAD CHILDREN AT THE END OF THE DAY, VERONICA...THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT THE REASONS BEHIND IT.

AND THE REASONS ARE USUALLY *PATHETIC*, ANYWAY.

GUYS LIKE LYNCH AND TAO... THIS WHOLE *WORLD* IS JUST A GAME TO THEM.

LOOK, JUST GO BACK TO YOUR HUSBAND AND FORGET ABOUT ME.

I COULD NEVER COME BACK NOW ANYWAY, NO MATTER *WHAT* LYNCH MAY HAVE TOLD YOU...

I LEFT HIM.

WHAT?

WELL, HE LEFT *ME*, REALLY... I GUESS.

AFTER THE TRUTH ABOUT YOU CAME OUT, THINGS *CHANGED* BETWEEN ALAN AND ME. ESPECIALLY AFTER LYNCH GOT ME REASSIGNED TO HIS TEAM.

GOD *DAMN* IT, VERONICA. I'M *NOT* WORTH THIS.

I'M NOT WORTH RUINING YOUR LIFE ALL OVER AGAIN.

WELL, YOU SHOWED UP HERE, *DIDN'T YOU?* AND YOU'RE WILLING TO MEET LYNCH, AFTER EVERYTHING.

SO MAYBE I'M NOT THE *ONLY ONE* WHO HASN'T QUITE GIVEN UP ON YOU, HOLDEN CARVER.

TRUST ME...YES, YOU *ARE.*

LOOK, DO YOU HAVE A MESSAGE FROM LYNCH OR *NOT?* BECAUSE I CAN'T TAKE ANY MORE OF THIS...

CALL THIS NUMBER IN TWO WEEKS. THERE'LL BE A ***MESSAGE*** WITH INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW HE'LL REACH YOU.

AND HE SAID YOU SHOULD ***TALK*** TO THE WOMAN YOU CAME HERE TO ***KILL***, WHICH, I ASSUME, MEANS SOMETHING TO YOU.

YEAH, IT DOES.

SO, IF I WAS TO KISS YOU GOOD-BYE, THAT WOULD ***HURT ME?*** I MEAN, ***PHYSICALLY?***

DON'T...

I HAVE TO.

AWW...GOD... ***JESUS FUCKING CHRIST!***

C'MON, SIT DOWN...IT'LL PASS IN A MINUTE. IT'S MOSTLY SHOCK.

HOLDEN?

YEAH?

I'VE MISSED YOU A LOT.

YOU CAN'T BRING ME BACK, VERONICA. IT'S ***NOT*** GOING TO HAPPEN.

I'M SORRY, BUT I JUST DON'T BELIEVE YOU...

HEY, I THOUGHT YOU SAID YOU CAME ***ALONE?***

WHAT? I ***DID--***

FREEZE, YOU FUCKING SCUMBAG!

STEP AWAY FROM MY WIFE!

ALAN?

HE MUST'VE PUT A TRACER ON ME AT SOME POINT. HE'S A GENIUS WITH TRACKING DEVICES.

GOOD TIME TO TELL ME.

I SAID ***STEP AWAY!*** OR MY MEN AND I WILL ***OPEN FIRE,*** DICKSHIT!

ALAN, WAIT. YOU DON'T WANT TO DO THIS...

DON'T ***TELL ME*** WHAT I WANT TO DO.

THAT MOTHERFUCKER IS WANTED FOR ***TREASON*** AND ***MURDER*** AND I'M ***BRINGING HIM IN.***

The arrival of the estranged husband is unfortunate, but it also gives me the answer to a question I'd been mulling for the past few minutes.

How to get Veronica to understand that I wasn't who she wanted me to be anymore.

How to get her to go away and never come back.

I make short work of the men, but I do it viciously.

I'm even more brutal with HIM.

HOLDEN! STOP IT!

YOU'LL KILL HIM...

Because I'm waiting for something...

And when I look up at her...

...She sees my eyes and steps back.

Now do you get it, Veronica?

Now can I stop breaking your heart?

THIS IS AGENT VERONICA ST. JAMES, FROM I.O. I NEED A U.N. ***MEDICAL TEAM*** RIGHT AWAY.

Brubaker*Phillips*Strachan*Fletcher*Quinn*Dunbier